

**PROCEEDINGS**  
OF THE  
**CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN  
SOCIETY**

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



**VOLUME LXXII**

for 1982 and 1983

**IMRAY LAURIE NORIE AND WILSON**

1984

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Published for the Cambridge Antiquarian Society (incorporating the Cambs and  
Hunts Archaeological Society) by Imray, Laurie Norie and Wilson Ltd, Wych House,  
Saint Ives, Huntingdon

ISSN.0309-3606

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## RYDER'S FARM, SWAVESEY

### A LATE THIRTEENTH CENTURY TIMBER-FRAMED AISLED HALL

E. M. DAVIS

#### *Introduction*

The aisled timber-framed hall forms the core of a farmhouse of several building periods. The timber structure, and moulding details of the crown-post and arcade-post suggest that the hall is of a late 13th century date. Enough of the original structure survives for a reconstruction to be made of two of the trusses. Further details are concealed in the plaster and brick walls, which will add to a fuller appreciation of the building when they are uncovered.

#### *Original Plan and Later Development*

The main east-west range of the farmhouse terminates with a two storey cross-wing to the west that projects beyond the building line to the south. To the east are two single storey extensions with attics built in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. The walls are timber framed and plastered with seventeenth-century field bricks and nineteenth-century painted brick. The roofs are plain-tiled.

Two bays of the original aisled building appear to have survived. The larger bay between the framed partitions or trusses A-A and B-B (see fig.), was the area of the hall: the shorter bay to the west was perhaps the cross-passage, the truss A-A possibly functioning as a spere truss which had a spere or screen spanning the opening. (Smith, 1975). The whole area of the hall including the cross-passage and aisles forms the traditional square plan. This plan is similar to two thirteenth-century aisled halls, one at 'The Manor Farm' Bourne, Cambs (R.C.H.M. 1968) and the other at 'The Bury' Clavering, Essex, (Hewett, 1980). At 'The Bury' the aisle form continues beyond the cross-passage as a service room, or rooms, with a chamber above; there would have also been a similar bay or cross-wing at the opposite end of the hall. It is quite possible that more of the original structure of Ryder's Farm lies within the matrix of the present building, and the cross-wing could well be part of the earlier plan. No openings have been found to indicate the original door or window positions. The roof timbers are, however, quite thickly smoke-blackened, showing that an open fire was in use for a long period of time.

A chimney stack was inserted into the hall against the east wall B-B in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, and at the same time a floor divided the remaining part of the hall into two storeys. Three bridging joists were found necessary to span the hall, the one in line with the north arcade being supported on a post against the chimney jamb. The south aisle was included into the space of the ground floor room, and the arcade post was removed at this level. The north arcade post 'a' was retained as a newel post for the stair, and the north-aisle used as a passage-way. The large space beside the hearth is a traditional place for a staircase which may have given access to other rooms.

The date of the cross-wing is uncertain. Part of the original timber-frame is exposed within a small service room that was added to the south in a two storey extension late in the 17th century. The whole of the cross-wing was cased in field bricks and was re-roofed and covered with plain tiles at this time.

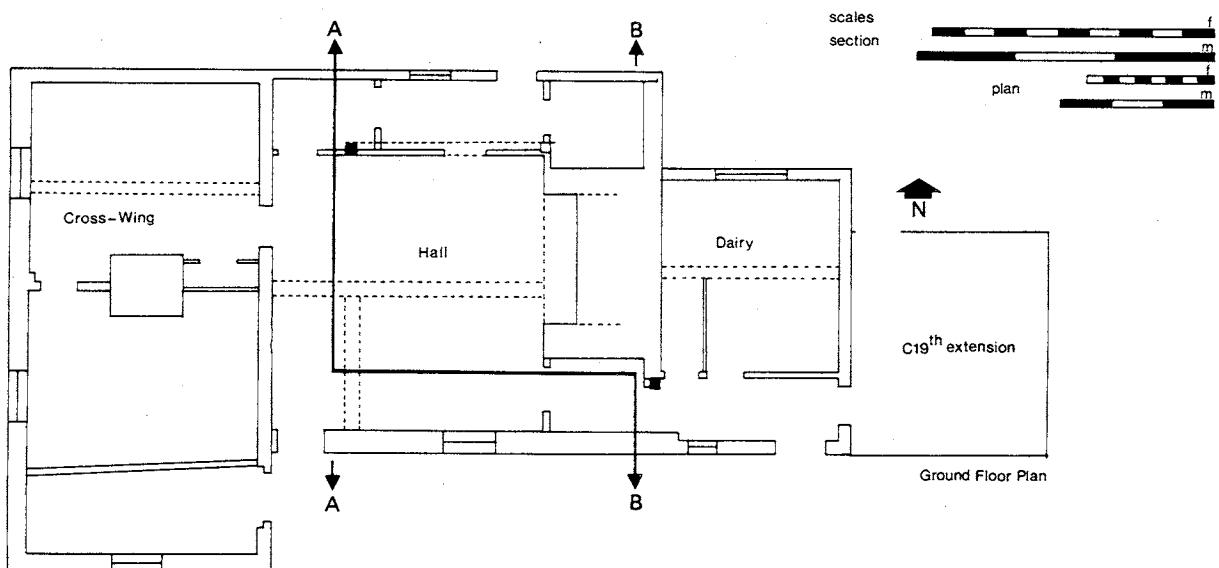
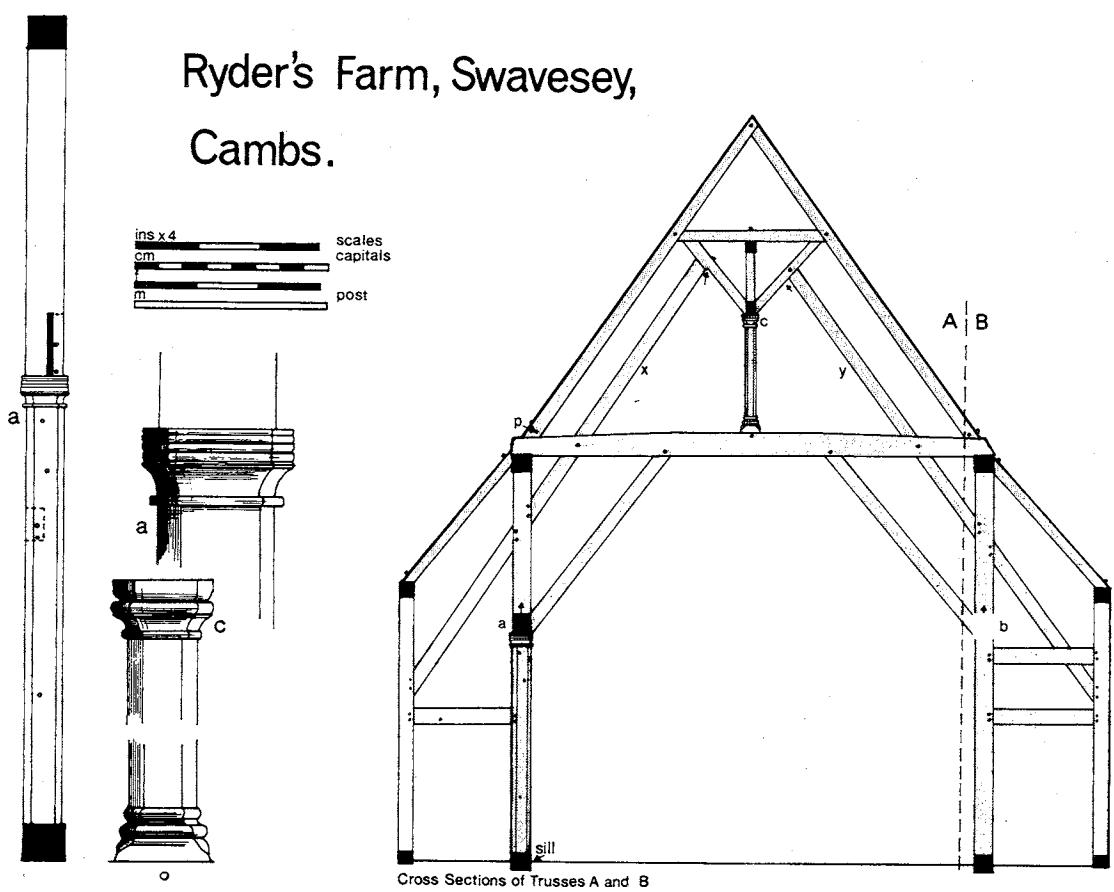
The seventeenth-century single-bayed extension to the hall on the east side may have been originally built as a dairy with a cheese chamber above it; it is still used as a dairy today. The main back entrance leads into a lobby beside the dairy, and to the right of this is a nineteenth-century kitchen also with a small attic chamber above it.

#### *Structure of the Aisled Hall*

The remaining structure of the hall is shaded on the drawing that shows the combined cross-sections of the spere truss A-A and the east wall B-B. The opposing arcade-post to 'a' is encased in a later partition wall at first floor level, and the arcade-post 'b' is all that has survived of the end wall after the insertion of the chimney stack. Both arcade-plates are visible with some common rafters *in situ* to the west of the spere-truss.

The structural pattern of Ryder's Farm has similarities with other aisled buildings of the transitional period of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries where passing braces, used in an earlier form of building construction, are superseded by the crown-post roof. In the transitional form both are used, though the arrangement of the passing braces varies. Four examples in the region are particularly relevant, 'Newlyns' Barrington, Cambs, and 'Bourn Manor Farm' Cambs (R.C.H.M. West Cambs 1968) 'The Three Blackbirds' Ely (R.C.H.M. 1980) and 'Bushmead Priory' Bushmead, Beds. (Alcock 1970).

## Ryder's Farm, Swavesey, Cambs.



The use of the crown-post at Ryder's Farm however appears to have been an innovation where the problems of securing it to the passing braces 'x' and 'y' were solved at the time of assembly. The crown-post braces were simply trimmed and pegged at the junction 'c', and the passing braces terminated and crudely pegged into them. The crown-post is tenoned to the collar purlin to which the collars, each in turn, are pegged. The assembly of the tie beam and the unjowled arcade-plates is with a lap-dovetail joint. The unjowled arcade-posts are tenoned to the wall-plates coinciding with the scarf-joints at truss A-A. The two scarf-joints in each arcade-plate measure 2ft. 6 ins. (0.76m) in length and are stop-splayed with under-squinted abutments and are secured by two large face pegs. This is one of the earliest types of scarf-joint (Hewlett, 1980) and no sophisticated carpentry joints are used in the building. The principal, and common rafters are simply pegged. At the base of the common rafters is an assembly hole 'p' that is thought to have been used by a rod of fixed length holding the rafters in position for the initial laying out of the roof truss and again at the time of its erection.

The moulding details of the deeply chamfered crown-post and the arcade-post are comparable with those at the stables at 'Church Farm' Fressingfield, Suffolk, dated to c. 1270 - 1330, (Hewett, 1980) and Bushmead Priory, Beds (Alcock, N. 1970). The carving is light, and at the base of the very shallow half-round mouldings of the arcade-post is a carinate fillet similar to one carved on the arcade-posts at 'Moynes Hall' Holywell, Cambs, which is possibly an early thirteenth-century example (Davis, 1982).

An interesting detail that may not be significant is the presence of a short length of timber beneath the arcade post 'a': it runs parallel to the arcade and is not traditionally at right angles to it, terminating in the aisle sill. Is this an earlier traditional position for the sill?

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